TWIN CITIES PRESBYTERY

PRESENTATION #3

THE POWER OF THE PREACHER

March 4, 1986

John M. Buchanan
Pastor
Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago

review

I. The Doing of the Pastor

Role and Function

II. The Power of the Pastor

Vision and Leadership

III. A Concluding Theological Reflection on Power

(Stotts)

Begin with a series of ideas on the

I. Role and Function of the clergyperson, the "Doing" of the Pastor. ~~Heart of my life~~

The format will be to share several ideas I have found helpful in my ministry; their respective sources; and something of the actual practices which have grown out of these ideas. I claim no originality. In fact, I suspect you may have heard all of this before.

Reason is that we are called to be stewards of a world God loves. Not a throw-away world — My life is not throw away - it is valuable, loved by God, important. It is matter of importance — how it gets used. My stewardship begins w/ how I

Organize it - use it
5 Basic ideas - on the Role of the Pastor
the doing of ministry

Idea number one I have called, Learning to live in the present. Its source is a little book under the title Minister on the Spot. It was written 14 years ago - providentially when I needed to learn about living in the present. Its author is James Dittes who was then, and still may be, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Religious Studies, and Professor, Psychology of Religion at Yale, and Editor of the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. Dittes helped me a great deal in a way which serves as a constant and helpful motif for me, particularly when the going gets touch.

Dittes took the story of the man who had been reposing on the portico of the Pool of Bethzatha for 38 years in John 5, and suggested that he was a fair representation of a lot of clergy. The man, Dittes had the audacity to suggest, really didn't want to be healed, actually healed in the present. Without pressing the metaphor too hard, may I suggest that there is something intrinsic about our humanity which is stimulated by the eschatalogical twist to our faith, the result of which is that many of us have trouble with the present tense...

Dittes helped me to see something ~~at the age of 30 or so~~ for which I am everlastingly grateful; namely that I had concluded that the Kingdom of God wasn't going to come in my parish.

Obviously, what I had going wasn't going to make it. But - with a little assist from the Vocations Agency, I might move, and then along with a few more dollars, bigger house, I would have the ecclesiastical resources to open the gates to the eschaton. The theme is played out in a myriad of variations... "If only I had better youth advisors the Senior High program would succeed. If only my Session members were as supportive as the Session of Tom, Dick, or Jane's church. If only my people could care." Many, if not most of us, I concluded, have heavily invested in the future's ability to bring us joy, a sense of satisfaction, completeness, or even salvation.

Dittes helped me finally to understand that those voices in the Bible which come with such stark clarity: to Moses - Elijah - Isaiah - Peter - Paul, were in all probability not very clear at all at the time; that the only certainty and clarity we may ever have is in looking backward to describe events, or looking forward with hope. The moment - the present - will probably be murky, unclear, ambiguous.

That was, and I believe it, good news. I found it liberating. I found that I took a lot less seriously the marvelous success stories I kept hearing about what someone else was doing and looked with new interest at my situation.

And as person - most of all - as person I was helped to see that it is part of my humanity which needed saving, this propensity to live so much for the future that the present moment is meaningful only insofar as it provides for, builds a better tomorrow. That's a lousy way to live: it's not a good way to be married - or to parent - or to plan one's life or to structure leisure time activities.

2 Idea number two is that The Ministry as Profession Is Macerating - more so, I have concluded than the profession of anyone else I know. This idea came from one of the most stimulating persons - certainly one of the most eloquent I have been privileged to know: Professor Joseph Sittler, University of chicago.

"To macerate" is to "chop up into small pieces," a grim but altogether accurate metaphor. The size or location of the parish doesn't matter; in fact there is a sense in which the smaller the congregation, the more macerated the minister. Our profession, alone so far as I know, demands that we be mystic, scholar, business person, counselor, manager, personnel director - all before lunchtime. And then comforter, grief therapist, conflict resolveer, theologian, cheerleader, coach, song leader, and cook. It is not an unusual day when you and I do all of that. I confess I love it. The counterpoint turns me on. To go from

~~Schoedinger~~ The's Funeral Home to the OB ward within the hour is a great, great privilege and a deep joy. But it is exhausting. And there is a real sense in which it is not possible certainly to do all of that fully and well and satisfactorily.

Sittler ~~wrote~~ wrote that in the classroom - and I can testify to the great distance between the rarified atmosphere of the Divinity School at Chicago and the basement of a small church in a small Northern Indiana town - "the student comes to know that the 'basileia tou theou' is a phrase of enormous scope and ~~depth~~, that its study ought to persist throughout life. And then the professor, visits the graduate on the job and sees the lines of old books on the shelves. Filed on top of these will be momentos of present concerns: a roll of blueprints; a file of negotiations between the parish, the bank and the Board of Missions; samples of aspalt tile; and a plumbers estimate." [p. 58]

The result: numbing, exhausting, life-denying maceration and a strong sense of vocational guilt.

What to do? Understand it, then decide which of these rolls define your own sense of call; get a Personnel Committee working in your church; get your people involved in clarifying what you should be doing with your time.

The third idea is that there is Rent to Be Paid in ministry. That idiom, [redacted], is the brainchild of James D. Glasse, former President of Lancaster Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Pastor, in his [redacted] book, Putting It Together in the Parish. Glasse simply said what most of us discover in time, namely that "most parishes want three things of their pastor. If he/she meets these minimal requirements he/she is free to do almost anything he/she wants to do. Once the rent is paid, he/she can march for peace, fly a plane, devote self to youth of the community, paint pictures, play golf - almost anything." [p. 54-55] But first - three things:

1. Preaching and worship: a service to which they are not ashamed to bring their friends.
2. Teaching and Pastoral Care (not cut rate psychotherapy): what they want to know is that their pastor cares for them and will be available when they need him/her.
3. Organization and Administration: a balanced budget, a building in reasonable repair and an organization that works.

Glass is convinced that pastors who deliver will be free - and that paying this rent is not a full time job.

We spend a lot of time complaining about the rent. The bottom line is that it isn't going to go away - or change much.

Idea four is that Administration Is Not the Dark Side of our calling, the boring, tedious routines which are the bane of our creativity. Administration: ad - minister. It was the late Jack Meister, First Church, Fort Wayne, who became head of the Council on Theological Education, who taught that one. It is ministry to enable ~~to organism of~~ the church to stand up, to grow, to walk. Administration is how you and I help our churches do what they want to do. ("Don't put it down and don't, for Christ's sake, literally - ignore it.") Meister used to say. If you believe in incarnation, if you mean it when you say ("I believe in the holy catholic church") there is nothing more important than your administration. Do it with your best intelligence, be prepared for it, improve your skills, give it prime time.

Idea five: What Are You Doing Here on Saturday Morning? This is my favorite, the one I treasure most. The situation was this: newly ordained, serving a small church in a small Indiana town, full of Inland steelworkers, a few truck farmers, and a teacher or two; I decided that it was important to work harder than anyone else in sight. I'd let them know that being a preacher is hard going. It was a Saturday morning, early. I was behind my desk. Into the study came the husband of the treasurer to bring me ny check and some muskmelons and a dozen eggs,

Mike Paddock, grizzled, tough foreman in the mill. "What the hell you doin' here on Saturday morning?" he asked. "You ought to be home with your family - like everybody else." "But, Mr. Paddock," I protested, "I need to be here, available, and on the job when my people are here." "Baloney!" he said. "People don't wanna see you today. They wanna go to the store, get a haircut, watch the game. Go home. They'll see you tomorrow."

I can count on one hand the Saturdays I have worked since that one, with the exception of weddings, of course, and, ironically, last Saturday when I wrote this.

Thanks to Mike I have, to the best of my ability, not asked my family to share my ministry. I was saved from a lot of nonsense because neither Sue nor I knew the first thing about the ministry nor really very much about the church. The University of Chicago, needless to say, was not aware of either - to my knowledge. So we didn't know about expectations for minister's spouses, or public behavior, or minister's children ~~- God, I hate what we persist in doing to them.~~ Sue typed because I didn't know how, but stopped dead in her tracks the minute it was part of anybody's expectations of her.